

Dear Mom and Dad,

We received letters from both of you recently so I decided to reply even though we will certainly talk to you before Christmas. Anyway, there are more interesting items to cover than I could ever report over the phone!

Mom, I was so pleased you read the milk article that now I will send along many more! I'm sure you just read it to please me but it did sound like good advice. A recent article, which I forgot to cut out, reported on test results which showed that older people don't notice thirst even though their need for water increases with age. So drink plenty of water.

I talked to Mary last night and told her how glad we were that Diane is getting a piano. I wish we could join you for Christmas, but the crowd will be large enough with the Lowry's there, I'm sure! As I told Mary, one can't find programs for the VIC-20 anymore so I sent a computer game for her and Dad to play. Thank you for the package. We haven't opened either it or Diane's present yet; we'll save it for Christmas. Susan Reed is coming over that day. She is baking bread and we are roasting veal ribs which will be accompanied by a heart of palm salad, green beans and brussel sprouts, and wild rice. For dessert we will have fruit compote (macedonia in Italy) and ice cream.

Today is our 15th wedding anniversary and I can report that I am very happily married and, as far as I can tell, so is Vickie! She may, of course, pack up and leave tomorrow - one never knows these days. Last night we were invited to a party at Bill Hunter's (my boss) house near Annapolis. We drove to Annapolis late in the afternoon and strolled around before having an early dinner at the Middleton Tavern which is near the harbor. It turned out to be an excellent place for dinner. After soup and salad bar Vickie had red snapper in wine sauce and I had the seafood platter which included a small fish fillet, crabcake, scallops and shrimp. Everything was well-prepared and we enjoyed it. The party, in spite of our expectations, was fun. People from the office were there, of course, and some others we had known from Naples. Mike Driscoll, who was also in the Med and joined ORINCON in May, showed up with his 20 year old girlfriend; young enough to be his daughter. This looked a little ridiculous for a twice-divorced man with three children but is common these days.

We have been very busy at work since several "deliverables" (i.e., reports) are due 31 December. Fortunately, I don't have to work on the holidays which for our company include Christmas eve and New Year's eve. Bill and Mike are a pleasure to work with and I know I am helping them out quite a bit. Last Thursday our office went out to lunch at the Cafe Italia which isn't far from the office and which you may remember. It has a good atmosphere and is pleasant for lunch. My friends John McQuiddy and Norm Jackson have both been over for lunch in the Underground. Norm is still struggling financially with child support and other costs

of divorce. He drives to Fredericksburg every weekend to visit his children.

Last week I picked up new glasses which are bifocals! I'm getting use to them and they aren't too bad. I probably could have managed with out them, but I did need a new prescription for distant vision and the ophthalmologist says it is better to get used to bifocals before the difference between far and near sight grows too large.

Last week we went to a lecture at the Smithsonian on a new exhibit of items from the reign of Louis XIV, the Sun King. Mary probably doesn't know she was born in a state named after Louis. He was not at all an admirable ruler but did build some magnificent places such as Versailles which we have enjoyed visiting. On New Year's eve we are going to the opera at the Kennedy Center.

We enjoyed the picture of Dad and me. He has gained a little weight and I have lost some! I glad Dad and Diane can make music together and I want you to know we never refer to Dad as the "old gaffer". I see that Seattle won a big game yesterday so everyone must have cheered up. The same sentiment exists here concerning the Redskins. I am getting much better informed about world events now that I am riding the bus and reading the newspaper. Soon I may be able to distinguish between Nicaragua, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador. Two recent items seem to me to indicate a high probability of life on other planets. The first is the discovery of likely planets around more than one neighboring sun. The second is the success in producing proteins and nucleic acids (basis of DNA) in laboratory simulations of early atmospheric conditions which are not particularly exotic. Of course it is a long way for those other folks to travel and we will probably never get to see them. There was also an article about walking across hot coals which I neglected to send to Mary.

Yesterday I got my modem hooked up to the computer. You have one with the Commodore, but probably haven't used it since the documentation is poor. My modem and the accompanying software permit me to store on disk the phone numbers, user ids, and passwords for various networks. These include the George Washington University computer, the ARPA net which connects me to our West Coast office and a vast array of computing facilities, the CompuServe network, and the Official Airline Guide. The latter was included as a two-month free trial with my modem purchase. I tried it last night. The modem connects directly into the telephone jack in the wall - no handset is necessary. I just type a key and it dials. From a miniature speaker I can hear the dial tone, the dialing, and the tone from the other computer. When connection is made the login procedure is automatic. In the OAG one can look at pages of schedule or pages of fares. The charge is by page, a small amount, so even if I had to pay it wouldn't amount to much to view data for a specific flight. I'll try to make a printout to send along. Please keep up the letters and we will talk to you soon.

Love,

Jim & Vickie